

## Turkish University Students' Perceptions on Bosnia-Herzegovina

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**Abstract:** Bosnia-Herzegovina, one of the Balkan countries in southeastern Europe, has declared its independence following the partition of Yugoslavia Federation. Historical and cultural ties between Bosnia-Herzegovina and Turkey are actually very strong. In this context, these two countries have signed various cultural and economic cooperation agreements. This study aims at determining the level of understanding and general knowledge of Turkish university students on Bosnia-Herzegovina. The samples of the study were obtained from students of Atatürk University Faculty of Education, Department of Geography Teaching. A scale consisted of open ended questions in order to determine the level of knowledge of the sample group on Bosnia-Herzegovina. Moreover, the students were asked to point out the place of Bosnia-Herzegovina and its neighbours on an empty world map. By this way we aimed to determine the situation of this country in the mind map of Turkish university students.

**Key Words:** Bosnia-Herzegovina, Turkey, perception, Turkish university students

### Introduction

Bosnia Herzegovina is one of the countries who declared their independence by the disintegration of Yugoslavia Federation in 1992. The country is bordered by Croatia to the north, west and south, Serbia to the east and Montenegro to the southeast. It has only 20 km of Adriatic Sea coastline. It has 51.129 km square surface area and has a population of around 4.6 million. Bosnia Herzegovina is ethnically the most distinctive country of all the countries who gained their independence after the demise of Yugoslavia Federation. Slav origin muslims who are also called Bosniaks being the most numerous population group of Bosnia constitutes more than 40% of the whole population. Bosniaks are being followed by Serbs (30%), Croats (17%), Montenegrins, Macedonian and Turks (Gözenç, 1995:107, Güner and Ertürk, 2005:53-54).

Bosnia, which makes up the southern part of the country was named after Bosnian River. Herzegovina was named after the land of voivode Stefan Vukčić who declared himself the Duke of Sava after rebelling against the Bosnian Kingdom towards the end of the medieval age (Herzeg: duke, ovina: land). There is another rumour that Turks named it Herzegovina to delineate the region (Herzeg: stone, ovin:land) (Karaman, 1992:1).

There are strong ties between Turkey and Bosnia Herzegovina in terms of cultural, political and economic aspects. Though they are slav community, the relations between Turkey and Bosnia Herzegovina, which accommodates a substantial number of population (40%) who converted to Islam later on, are thriving day after day. In this sense, this study reflects the general knowledge level of Turkish students about Bosnia Herzegovina and their attitudes towards this country. The sample of the study is drawn from the students who receive geography education in the Faculty of Education of Kazım Karabekir at Atatürk University in Erzurum, Turkey. A survey consisting of open-ended questions was conducted to display Turkish students' knowledge of Bosnia Herzegovina. Additionally, they were prescribed to mark the location of Bosnia Herzegovina and neighbouring countries on the blank map they were given. Thus, this was also an attempt to assess the position of Bosnia Herzegovina in their mind map. In the

sense that this study reveals Turkish students' perception of Turkey's brother country Bosnia Herzegovina and their knowledge of map, the data obtained is thought to be beneficial.

## Findings

The samples of the study are composed of 202 students (64 female-138 male) who study chemistry in the Faculty of Education of Kazım Karabekir at Atatürk University in Erzurum. 31.7% of the respondents are female, 68.3% of the respondents are male (Table 1).

	Female		Male		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
First class students	18	38.2	29	61.8	47	100.0
Second class students	6	20.0	24	80.0	30	100.0
Third class students	8	25.8	23	74.2	31	100.0
Fourth class students	10	30.3	23	69.7	33	100.0
Fifth class students	11	34.4	21	65.6	32	100.0
Non-Thesis Master	11	37.9	18	62.1	29	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>31.7</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>68.3</b>	<b>202</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 1:** The gender of the students and their conditions in their classes

"Where does the name 'Bosnia Herzegovina' come from?" is the question which is answered right by the least number of Turkish students. 55.4% of the students did not answer the question at all. Almost all the remaining students answered wrong. Some of the responses given by the students are as follows:

"The name of the country is named after the cities Bosnia and Herzegovina" (Student:9,81,133,184).

"The name of the country comes from the public of Bosnia and Herzegovina" (Öğrenci:20,60,120).

"The name comes from Bosniaks" (Student:23,59, 101, 194, 120).

Just one student replied that the name 'Bosnia' was named after the "Bosnian River".

One of the asked questions in the poll was about the country the unit of which Bosnia Herzegovina was before gaining its independence. It is seen that more than 80% of the students gave the right answer which is "Yugoslavia". Some of the students replied as "the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Montenegro and Austria Hungary (Table 2).

Countries	First Class Students		Second Class Students		Third Class Students		Fourth Class Students		Fifth Class Students		Non-Thesis Master		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Yugoslavia	35	74.4	23	76.6	27	87.2	25	76.0	27	84.4	25	86.2	162	80.1
USSR	8	17.1	3	10.0	1	3.2	1	3.0			3	10.4	16	8.0
Montenegro	4	8.5					3	9.0	5	15.6			12	5.9
Austria					2	6.4	1	3.0					3	1.5
Kosovo					1	3.2							1	0.5
Czechoslovakia							3	9.0					3	1.5
Hungary											1	3.4	1	0.5
No answer			4	13.4									4	2.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>202</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 2:** The findings related to Bosnia Herzegovina's gaining its independence after the disintegration of which country

Another question towards to students was the ethnic structure of Bosnia Herzegovina. 24.2% of the surveyed group stated Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats as the ethnic groups in the majority. Additionally, what is astonishing is that referring to Bosnians "Turk and muslim population" was mentioned by a great number of students. Beside this, the presence of Albanian, Hungarian, Turk and Bulgarian population was also expressed. Only 5.9% of the students talked of the Slav race, but 24% of the students did not give any answer to the question at all.

Map is one of the most significant equipments used in geograph education. In this sense, students were given a wordless map and they were told to mark the location of Bosnia Herzegovina and write the neighbouring countries. 69% of the students could mark the location of Bosnia Herzegovina (Table 3). The rate of the students who could write the names of the neighbouring countries was too low (16%). Most of the correct responses were received from the 4th year students. The countries which were stated as the neighbours were primarily Serbia, Croatia and Montenegro. However, their locations on the map couldn't be marked correctly. That Greece and Bulgaria were also indicated as the neighbouring countries is bewildering.

	First Class Students		Second Class Students		Third Class Students		Fourth Class Students		Fifth Class Students		Non-Thesis Master		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
True	25	53.2	21	70.0	21	67.7	31	93.9	25	78.1	18	62.1	141	69.8
False	22	46.8	9	30.0	10	32.3	2	6.0	7	21.9	11	37.9	61	30.2
Total	47	100	30	100	31	100	33	100	32	100	29	100	202	100

**Table 3:**The state of marking Bosnia Herzegovina's location on the map

One more question asked to Turkish university students in the study was the capital city of Bosnia Herzegovina. It is clearly seen that the vast majority of the students (94.1%) gave the right answer which is Sarajevo.

	First Class Students		Second Class Students		Third Class Students		Fourth Class Students		Fifth Class Students		Non-Thesis Master		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
True	43	91.5	29	96.7	28	90.3	31	94.0	30	93.7	29	100	190	94.1
False	1	2.1							2	6.3			3	1.5
No answer	3	6.4	1	3.3	3	9.7	2	6.0					9	4.4
Total	47	100	30	100	31	100	33	100	32	100	29	100	202	100

**Table 4:** Reputation of the capital of Bosnia Herzegovina

Another question asked to the students was about the short Adriatic Sea coastline Bosnia Herzegovina has (20 km). More than 80% of the students answered right. The fact that some students pointed out that it doesn't have any coastline is remarkable. 5% of the students in the survey did not give any answer to the question (Table 5).

	First Class Students		Second Class Students		Third Class Students		Fourth Class Students		Fifth Class Students		Non-Thesis Master		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Adriatic	41	87.3	19	63.3	23	74.2	28	84.8	30	93.8	27	93.1	168	83.2
No maritime			10	33.4	7	22.6	4	12.2	1	3.1			22	11.0
Red Sea			1	3.3									1	0.4
Baltic	1	2.1											1	0.4
No answer	5	10.6			1	3.2	1	3.0	1	3.1	2	6.9	10	5.0
Total	47	100	30	100	31	100	33	100	32	100	29	100	202	100

**Table 5:** Findings about the Adriatic Sea coastline of Bosnia Herzegovina

It is known that there are strong historical and cultural affinities between Turkey and Bosnia Herzegovina. As a consequence of this, there have been collaborations in a variety of fields. However, it is surprising that a great number of Turkish students (35.7%) are not aware of the relations between the two countries adequately. The students gave answers like "the relations are far behind than they should be", "they should improve." Around 12% of the students gave no answer (Table 6). The rate of those who regard the relations between the two countries good /very good is 52%. The good relations between Turkey and Bosnia Herzegovina are explained mostly as religious, cultural and ethnic affinity.

	First Class Students		Second Class Students		Third Class Students		Fourth Class Students		Fifth Class Students		Non-Thesis Master		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Good/very good	25	53.2	19	63.3	24	77.4	12	36.3	15	46.8	10	34.4	105	52.0
Not good enough	10	21.2	10	33.4	3	9.7	17	51.5	15	46.8	17	58.7	72	35.7
No answer	12	25.6	1	3.3	4	12.9	4	12.2	2	6.4	2	6.9	25	12.3
Total	47	100	30	100	31	100	33	100	32	100	29	100	202	100

**Table 6:** The relations between the two countries according to students' views

The responses given by the students to the question “what does ‘Bosnia Herzegovina’ evoke first for you?” are analyzed in Table 7. According to the findings, for around 47% of them it evokes “wars and violence”, for 20% of them “Mostar Bridge”, for 10% of them “Ottoman State”, and for 8% of them, it evokes the Turk population living in the country.

	f	%
War and violence	95	47.0
Mostar Bridge	42	20.7
Ottoman Empire	20	10.0
Türkish population	18	8.9
Football	4	1.9
İzzet Begoviç	3	1.5
No answer	20	10.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>202</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 7:** The evocations of Bosnia Herzegovina for Turkish students

The students who got involved in the study were asked to express the most significant common ground between the two countries. 37% of the students stated “the unity of religion”, 32.6% of them “the unity of culture and history”, and 18.3% of them “ethnic relationship” (Table 8).

	f	%
Religious union	73	37.0
History and culture association	66	32.6
Ethnic relationship	26	18.3
No answer	37	12.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>202</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 8:** The most important common ground between the two countries according to students' views

## Conclusion

It is possible to say that the general knowledge level of Turkish students about Bosnia Herzegovina is lower than expected in general and the result does not differ a lot in different classes. The question which was answered right by the majority of the students was the question about the capital city of Bosnia Herzegovina and the question answered right by the least number of students was the source of the country's name. A great number of students

who participated in the survey stated that Bosnia Herzegovina was a unit of Yugoslavia before gaining its independence. Nevertheless, it is very distressing that 20% of the students, who are also receiving geography education answered it wrong.

Despite the fact that maps are among the materials utilized intensively in geography education, it is seen that they are not made use of adequately (Doğanay et al., 2001:35). Moreover, it is impossible to perceive the events taking place in a region without knowing the geographical location of the region and its neighbours. Unfortunately, the number of the students who could not mark the exact location of Bosnia Herzegovina on the map is too high to ignore. The rate of those who could mark the neighbouring countries is considerably low. As for this question, though the success of the 1st year students is a bit less than others, it could be stated that there is not much difference between the classes. The reason behind these results might be students' not making use of maps and atlas while studying lessons with content of countries. Therefore, some measures encouraging the use of map and atlas must be taken. Related to this issue again, the number of the students who pointed out that Bosnia Herzegovina does not have any coastline is not very little either. In addition to the reasons mentioned above, the fact that the country's having the Adriatic Sea Coastline might not be visible on the commonly used atlas and maps could also have an effect on students' giving wrong answers.

Turkish students expressed that the level of the relations between the countries are not as they should be. That the first thing that Bosnia Herzegovina evokes for the students is 'war and violence' is something remarkable. It has been demonstrated once again how distressing the things that once took place in this region are for humanity. The students mentioned "Mostar Bridge" in the second place. The remark one of the students (Student:156) was quoted saying "Two cities named Bosnia and Herzegovina are located here and Mostar Bridge connects them each other" shows Turkish students misperceptions.

'The unity of religion' was the very thing mentioned by the students who participated in the survey as the most important common ground between the two countries. Turkish students were able to know that Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats are the ethnic groups in the majority. However, according to the data we have, the students have also a perception which is not true. Muslim Bosniak population of Slav origin is thought to be of Turk ethnic background. This indicates that this has an important impact on students' understanding of Bosnia. It is a typical example of the misperceptions of Turkish students as well.

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